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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a process that empowered special education teachers in Greenville Independent School District (Texas) to begin moving toward an inclusive model of special education. Specifically, the paper examines special education teachers' levels of concern regarding inclusion during this process. During the summer, 26 special education teachers met to develop goals and plans for implementing inclusion. Following the meeting, teachers completed the Change Facilitator Stages of Concern Questionnaire (CFSoCQ), which was also administered to a control group of 14 special education teachers from a neighboring district. On the CFSoCQ, respondents indicate how accurately 35 items describe their feelings about an innovation. The profiles of the two groups were similar, with teachers showing high levels of concern about information issues and the personal demands of inclusion, and also some concern for how inclusion would be managed. Early in the school year, the Greenville teachers developed a plan for training administrators and teachers about inclusion and for educating shareholders. Following this phase, the CFSoCQ was administered again. The control group's levels of concern remained the same, but those of the Greenville teachers had decreased since the beginning of the school year. This paper suggests that teachers' concerns were lowered because they were empowered to initiate change, had opportunities to visit other settings where inclusion was practiced, and were given opportunities to share skills and information regarding inclusion. (LP)

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Inclusion is defined by Roach (1995) as the provision of educational services to students with a full range of abilities and disabilities in the general education classroom with appropriate in-class support. This philosophical stance is in sharp contrast to the traditional concept of "mainstreaming" where students with disabilities are placed in general education classes for part of the school day while maintaining their home-base in special education. With "mainstreaming," placement in the regular education setting is tolerated with the knowledge that the child will return to the special education classroom after a specified period of time.

The implementation of an inclusive philosophy forces a profound shift from the "mainstream" paradigm. Teachers must come to grips with the belief that students with disabilities belong in the general education setting. Membership in regular classes is not a privilege, but a right. Bias in the "mainstreaming" philosophy unwittingly nurtures the belief that children with disabilities do not belong, a belief challenged by inclusion. Teachers are asked to redefine their view of how the system should respond to students with disabilities, which can be a painful process for many educators.

In the Greenville Independent School District, an average-sized school district in Northeast Texas, an attempt was made to smooth the transition from the traditional exclusionary model to inclusive classrooms. Empowered by the Special Education Director, special education teachers spent a year planning and implementing inclusion in the style they felt was appropriate for their particular district.

Prior to the experiment, a dual system of education existed in Greenville. The general education teachers took care of the majority of the students and the special education teachers taught the special education students. Time spent in the general education setting was dependent on whether the student was "ready" for regular education

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and the regular teacher was simply expected to make the transition work.

Of the myriad problems encountered in moving to an inclusive model, changing attitudes and beliefs is particularly troublesome. In Greenville, many special education teachers appeared to doubt the advantages of inclusion for students; for some the new role as a collaborator and supporter of regular education teachers was foreign. The Special Education Director realized that supporting the special education teachers through this change process was an urgent concern and decided to implement an empowerment model to make the transition more successful. Outside facilitators were employed to apply a process approach to change.

Described here are 1) the key issues surrounding change, 2) a description of the Change Facilitator Stages of Concerns Questionnaire used to measure changes in teachers' concerns regarding inclusion during the year in which the interventions took place, 3) the details of the teachers' activities surrounding inclusion, and 4) a report of teachers' concerns as measured by the CBAM Questionnaire.

CHANGE

Change is a process that occurs over a period of time rather than a single event which we can attribute to a particular day or moment (Cuban, 1988; Fullan, 1991; Fullan and Miles, 1992). A number of models have been developed to measure and explain what exactly occurs during the change process. Most of these models describe change as a series of phases in which the vents in one part of the process inform and impact the decisions made at another phase (Guier, 1997). One model that measure teachers' concerns about change is the Concern-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) which resulted from research conducted over twenty years (Hall & Hord, 1987; Hord, et al., 1991). The Change Facilitator Stages of Concerns Questionnaire (CFSoCQ) created by the same researchers is designed to document change in levels of concern teachers have about change during the implementation of an innovation and was the instrument used in the study described here.

Levels of Concern Hord, et al identify seen stages of concern that users of an innovation may have. These include: a)Stage 0-Awareness Concerns, b) Stage 1-Informational Concerns, c) Personal Concerns, d) Stage 3-Management Concerns, e) Stage 4-Consequence Concerns, f) Stage 5-Collaboration Concerns, and g) Stage 6-

Refocusing Concerns. To obtain a reading of individual's concerns, CFSoCQ requires respondents to indicate their attitudes about an innovation by marking 35 items on a 0 to 7 Likert scale according to how accurately the items describe the respondent's current feeling about the innovation. The items represent seven stages of concern, 5 items for each stage. Raw scores for each stage are converted to percentile scores and arrayed on a Stages of Concern profile. For this study, raw scores were averaged for each group (see Tables 1 & 2).

While the Stages of Concern vary in intensity, Guier (1997) describes teachers' progress toward full implementation as beginning with little concern about their involvement with an innovation, then moving to a stage where they are concerned about how the innovation will affect them personally, and finally, shifting to task-related concerns. In the last stage, the innovation is institutionalized, teachers are comfortable with the change and their concern is for exploring more universal benefits from the innovation.

If special education teachers were to move in a logical progression through the levels of concern during the implementation of inclusion one would expect that, when special education directors begin to discuss the concept, the teachers' level of concern is minimal. As the director, principals, and central office administration support the change and special education teachers understand that inclusion is inevitable, the teachers' levels of concern shift and teachers begin to wonder how inclusion is going to affect their own classrooms, how they will manage to help children with disabilities in regular classrooms, and what the consequences will be for all the children. Finally, once inclusion is implemented, teachers' concerns center on how special education and regular classroom teachers can combine their efforts for the optimal good of the students. They might be concerned about matters beyond their own situations such as how they can conduct workshops to help others successfully implement inclusion. Progression toward inclusion is unlikely to occur in an orderly manner but is likely to fluctuate as barriers are encountered, as anxiety increases and decreases, and as enthusiasm waxes and wanes. The study described here involved special education teachers and their efforts to effectively implement inclusion in their own district. The teachers' levels of concern were monitored throughout the study using the CFSoCQ.

THE PROCESS

Because the success of any innovation depends largely on the interest and involvement of those most impacted by the change (Guier, 1997), all aspects of this study began with the teachers. The Greenville special education teachers (the Training Group) met, formed a vision, planned, and conducted the activities with support, and little interference, from their Director.

Phase One During the summer, the Special Education Director, the special education teachers, and the two change facilitators spent an entire day discussing inclusion. Of the 26 teachers involved a) 25 hold valid teaching certificates, b) 21 hold Generic Special Education certificates, c) 17 had previous inclusion training, while 8 reported no previous training. d) of the 17 reporting inclusion training, 10 received it from district inservices, 14 from Regional Service Centers, 4 from university courses, 11 from workshops, and 1 from another source. Included in the subject population were an administrator, 3 supervisors, a speech pathologist and 3 educational diagnosticians.

Dividing the subjects into two groups (A and B), the facilitators used the Nominal Group Technique, a Du Pont Leadership Training Tool (1993), to guide the groups in forming a vision of what inclusion should look like in Greenville Independent School District. After several hours of discussion, sorting, and consensus building, Group A outlined the following vision. "To continue improvement of inclusion in Greenville it would be ideal to: 1. Have an understanding and support among administrators and staff regarding inclusion; 2. Have a concrete plan to implement and evaluate inclusion, and 3. Have all the staff resources and training in place to implement the plan."

Group B's vision was similar. "To continue improvement of inclusion in Greenville it would be ideal to: Have enough money and time to provide training and staffing for collaboration; 2. Have a consensus by all on direction and implementation of successful inclusion; 3. Have a team that trains together to have the same understanding in order to collaborate with regard to individuality, consisting of community and school representatives."

Following this meeting the CFSoCQ was administered to the Training Group and to a Control Group made up of special education teachers in a neighboring comparable district. Of the 14 teachers in the Control Group, a) 13 hold valid teaching certificates, b) 12 hold Generic Special Education certificates, c) 10 had previous inclusion

training while 4 reported no previous training, d) of the 10 reporting inclusion training, 1 received it from district inservices, 5 from Regional Service Centers, 3 from university courses, 5 from workshops.

For the Training Group and the Control Group, the raw scores for each Stage of Concern were averaged to obtain a single profile (see Table 1). The profiles of the two groups are similar with teachers showing high concern about information issues and personal demands of inclusion, and some concern for how inclusion will be managed. Less concern was expressed by both groups for the consequences of inclusion for students, how inclusion could be used by others or for exploring universal benefits of the innovation. Hall, George, and Rutherford (1986) describe this type of profile as commonly found in those who are nonusers of an innovation where teachers are somewhat aware of and concerned about the innovation.

Phase Two Early in the school year and in accordance with the vision formed during the summer, the Greenville teachers met to develop a plan for achieving their vision. Group A worked on a model for training administrators and teachers in their district, while Group B developed a plan to educate shareholders on what the teachers were currently doing. Group A began their work by researching and benchmarking. They gathered and shared journal articles about inclusion, and then spent some time visiting each others' campuses as well as some outside the district to gain a clearer picture of what needed to be done. Group B began work on a video tape of inclusion in their schools to use when informing teachers, parents, students, administrators, board members, and support staff of what inclusion entails.

Following this Phase, at mid-year, the CFSoCQ was again administered to the Greenville teachers and to the Control Group. Table 2 shows that, while the Control Group's Levels of Concern were still similar to their Levels at the beginning of the school year, those of the Training Group (Greenville) had changed. Their Stage 4 Level dropped, indicating that the intensity of their concern for the consequences of inclusion for students had decreased since the beginning of the year (Pre=43, post=33).

Hord, et. al., (1991) suggest interventions useful for allaying concerns at each stage. To alleviate concerns regarding consequences of an innovation (Stage 4), the following are suggested: a) provide

individuals with opportunities to visit other settings; b) give support, c) find opportunities for sharing skills, and d) share information pertaining to the innovation. The Greenville Training Group engaged in these four activities occurred during Phase 2 which is reflected in their reported levels of concern regarding inclusion.

While the study is still in progress, it is predicted that the teachers in Greenville and the Control Group will continue to vary in their concerns about inclusion due to the interventions. At mid-year, inspection of preliminary results suggests change in the 4th Stage of Concern (Consequences) for the Training Group but not for the Control Group. This finding does support the expected direction as identified by Hord et al (1991). The Training Groups' concerns are expected to move from Awareness to Refocusing, a change which may or may not fully occur by years' end but will be worth monitoring for several years. If the techniques used here prove to enable successful implementation of inclusion, they are worth noting. Other districts might also find empowerment of special education teachers a path worth following.

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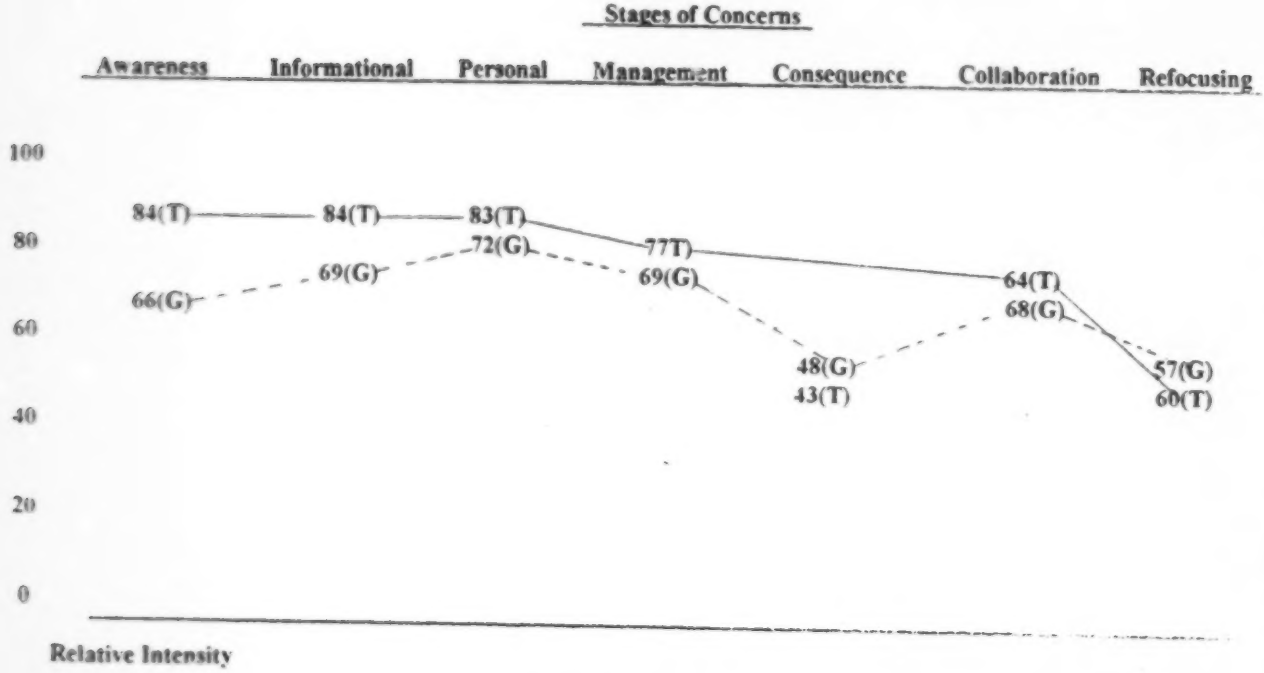
Table 1

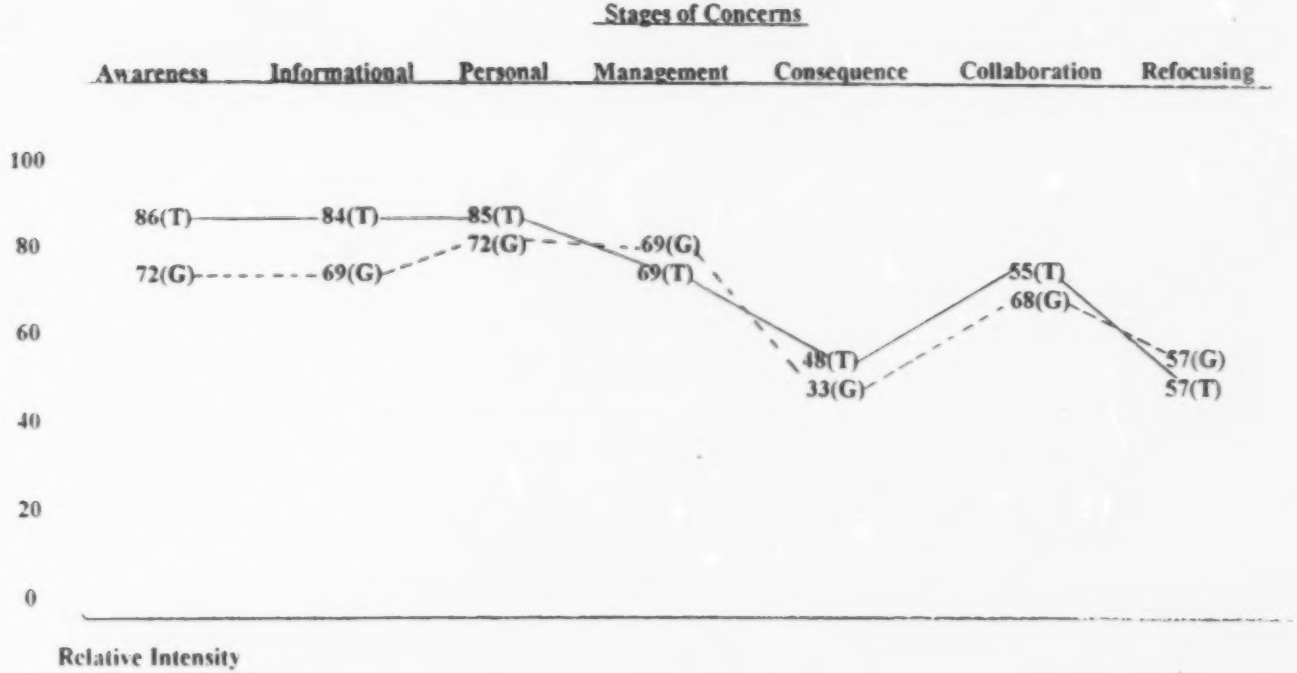
Initial Levels of Concern for Inclusion within two groups before training



N(G)=Training Group of teachers N(T)=Control Group of teachers

Table 2

Initial Levels of Concern for Inclusion within two groups after training(mid-year)



N(G)=Training Group of teachers N(T)=Control Group of teachers